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SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS

IN WHICH A BANQUET IS HELD, AND OF WHAT COMES AFTER; CONCERNING DIPLOMACY AND BEDROOMS, BLACKMAIL AND THREATS; AND AN UNUSUAL RECIPE FOR SAUSAGES.

the

# SANDMAN™

SEASON OF MISTS 5

gaiman jones pratt

The Dreaming.

GREETINGS TO YOU, GOOD GATEKEEPER.

I PRAY YOU: TELL YOUR MASTER THAT CLURACAN OF FAERIE IS HERE, AS A MESSENGER, AND WOULD HAVE WORDS WITH HIM.

OUR LORD BIDS YOU *ENTER*. YOU ARE ONE OF *MANY* TO ARRIVE THIS DAY, CLURACAN. THE LORD OF DREAMS IS HOLDING A FEAST FOR HIS VISITORS.

IF YOU AND YOUR COMPANION ADVANCE, YOU WILL FIND YOURSELVES IN THE BANQUETING HALL.

CONVERSION BY WILDSTORM

Hello, Cluracan. Be you welcome in my house, this night.

THANK YOU, LORD SHAPER. I AM SENT HERE AS AN *AMBASSADOR* FROM THE *COURT OF FAERIE*, MY SOVEREIGN LADY AND LORD PRESENT THEIR COMPLIMENTS. *THIS* LADY IS NUALA, MY SISTER.

CHARMED, SIRE.

You have ridden far. Do you wish to refresh yourselves, before you join the meal?

WE'LL EAT *NOW*, SIRE, IF IT'S ALL THE SAME TO YOU.

You are the guests here: your wishes are paramount.

Follow me.

D'YOU KNOW WHO THE **MIGHTIEST** OF THE AESIR IS, EH? I'LL **TELL** YOU. IT'S **ME**. S'RIGHT.

**HO!** MORE **ALE** OVER HERE! AND **STEP LIVELY!**

D'YOU WANT TO PLAY WITH MY **HAMMER**? EH, MISS PUSSY-HEAD? IT'S CALLED **MJOLLNIR**. IF I **RUB** IT, IT GETS **BIGGER**. S'TRUE.

JUST IGNORE THE LOUT, BAST.

YOU ARE NOT **EATING**, LOKI WOLF'S-FATHER.

THE DREAM-KING'S **WINES** ARE **GOOD**. YOU SHOULD WET YOUR THROAT, AT LEAST.

AFTER TWELVE HUNDRED YEARS? I AM OUT OF THE **HABIT** OF EATING, ALL-FATHER, AND I FEAR THAT **WINE** WOULD GO TO MY **HEAD**.

**NO**. I AM CONTENT TO **WATCH**.

CAN **I** HAVE SOME MORE **ICE CREAM**?

CERTAINLY, PRINCESS JEMMY.

I **KNOWED** YOU'D SAY THAT.

MY LORD -- I WAS CHARGED NEITHER TO EAT NOR SLEEP, NOR TO WAIT BEFORE I GAVE YOU THE MESSAGE FROM MY KING AND MY QUEEN.

I UNDERSTAND THAT THIS *MAY* NOT BE CONVENIENT, BUT...

I would not have you risk the ire of Titania and Auberon, Cluracan. Speak your piece.

LORD SHAPER, *YOU* NOW OWN THE HELL THAT ONCE WAS LUCIFER'S.

BY ANCIENT COMPACT, *FAERIE* MUST PAY THE *TEIND*-- OUR *TITHE* -- TO *HELL*, EVERY SEVEN YEARS. WE ARE FORCED TO *SACRIFICE* TO THEM NINE OF OUR WISEST, OUR MOST BEAUTIFUL...

*LORD--ALL* THESE BEINGS ARE HERE TO PERSUADE YOU TO GRANT *THEM* THE RIGHTS TO HELL.

BUT IT WOULD BE TO THE BENEFIT OF FAERIE IF HELL WERE TO *REMAIN EMPTY.*

WE BEG YOU: GIVE IT TO *NONE* OF THEM.

I see.

OF COURSE, IT'S NOT JUST A FAVOR WE'D BE ASKING. THERE IS *MUCH* THAT FAERIE CAN OFFER YOU.

FOR EXAMPLE: *NHALA*, HERE. MY SISTER. *SHE'S* FOR *YOU*. A *GIFT*, TO SHOW YOU OUR GOOD FAITH.

MY LORD.

There are many visitors here, Cluracan. They want many things.

Tomorrow I will talk with you all, and make my decision. Not now.

Enjoy the banquet.

BUT, MY LORD...

You have delivered your message, and you heard my response. Your obligation is fulfilled.

The matter is ended, Cluracan. Your impertinence invites my severest displeasure.

I--I BEG *PARDON*, LORD SHAPER. I DID NOT *MEAN* TO PRESUME...

Enough, Cluracan. I will talk to you more later.

MY LORD? MY LADY? WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO BRING YOU?

JUST *WINE*. BRING ME A BOTTLE, AND A GLASS. NO, FORGET THE GLASS. BUT MAKE THAT TWO BOTTLES...

I WILL HAVE *FLOWER BLOSSOMS*, PLEASE. VIOLETS, ROSE PETALS, AND GILLY-FLOWERS.

AND WATER.

AND WHAT DO YOU **SEE**, WHEN YOU WATCH, GIANTS' SON?

I SEE **MANY** THINGS, GALLOWS GOD. AND THEY **AMUSE** ME.

"I SEE **SUSANO-O-NO-MIKOTO;** A STORM GOD, LIKE YOUR SON, A LONE MEMBER OF HIS ANCIENT PANTHEON.

"HE DRINKS RICE WINE AND EATS RAW FISH."

"I SEE **ANUBIS,** GOD OF THE DEAD OF THE NILE DELTA, FEASTING UPON HUMAN HEARTS --OR UPON THE DREAMS OF HUMAN HEARTS, PERHAPS.

"THE FAIRY WOMAN, AS SHE EATS THE PETALS OF FLOWERS. I WONDER WHY SHE IS HERE, WHAT SHE IS THINKING ABOUT.

"AND I WONDER WHAT SHE WOULD BE LIKE BETWEEN THE SHEETS.

"IT'S BEEN TWELVE HUNDRED YEARS SINCE I DID *THAT,* AS WELL."

"I WATCH THE **DEMON** CONTINGENT. THERE IS A PECULIAR FLIRTATION OCCURRING BETWEEN CHORONZON AND THE MERKIN, MOTHER OF SPIDERS.

"WATCH."

DOES THAT **HURT,** DARLING?

OH YESSS.

"I WATCH THE **LORD OF ORDER,** HIS FORM THAT OF ORDER MADE **MANIFEST:** AN EMPTY RECEPTACLE.

"AND LIKE **ALL** OF US, KILDERKIN OF ORDER IS HERE FOR **HELL.**

"I WATCH THE **PRINCESS OF CHAOS,** INCARNATE AS A TINY CHILD.

"I WATCH OUR **SERVANTS** -- SLEEPING HUMANS, SHANGHAIED INTO A **MOST** PECULIAR DREAM, IN WHICH THEY SERVE A GAGGLE OF BEINGS FROM THE DEPTHS OF THEIR COLLECTIVE **UNCONSCIOUS,** A MEAL FIT FOR THE **GODS."**

"AND, ABOVE ALL, I WATCH THE *ANGELS*. THEY DO NOT EAT, OR FLIRT, OR CONVERSE.

"THEY *OBSERVE*.

"I WATCH THEM IN *AWE*, ALL-FATHER; THEY ARE SO BEAUTIFUL AND DISTANT. THE FEET OF ANGELS NEVER TOUCH THE BASE EARTH, NOT EVEN IN DREAMS.

"I CAN READ *NOTHING* FROM THEIR FACES, MUCH AS I TRY.

"AND WHAT THEY ARE THINKING, I CANNOT EVEN IMAGINE."

# SEASON of MISTS Chapter ≈ 5

*In which a banquet is held, and of what comes after; concerning diplomacy and bedrooms, blackmail and threats; and an unusual recipe for sausages.*

NEIL GAIMAN, Writer
KELLEY JONES, Penciller
GEORGE PRATT, Inker
DAN VOZZO, Colorist
TODD KLEIN, Letterer
ALISA KWITNEY, Asst. Editor
KAREN BERGER, Editor

SANDMAN, featuring characters created by Gaiman, Kieth and Dringenberg

Is everything to your liking, Lord Odin?

VERY MUCH SO. YOU ARE A FINE HOST, DREAM-WEAVER.

THERE IS A MATTER WE MUST DISCUSS. YOU HAVE SOMETHING I NEED; AND I HAVE IN MY POSSESSION SOMETHING YOU MIGHT WANT.

I WOULD TALK WITH YOU.

I see.

After the banquet, then.

Wait in your room. I will send a flame to guide you to me; and we can talk.

There will be an entertainment, at the conclusion of this meal, Lord Odin. I trust you will enjoy it.

WHO ARE YOU? I KNOW I'VE SEEN YOU BEFORE. WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

PLEASE. I HAVE TO SERVE THIS FOOD...

COME ON, MISSY PUSSY. YOU AN' ME. JUS' ONE LITTLE KISS. AN' JUS' ONE LITTLE FEEL. AN' MAYBE AFTER THAT...

...SO WHAT'SS THISS EXTRA INDUCEMENT LORD AZAZEL IS GOING TO OFFER MORPHEUS, TO MAKE HIM GIVE US BACK OUR LANDS, MY SWEET?

LATER, PRECIOUS. IN MY BEDROOM.

EEOWWW!

YOU DIN' HAVE TO DO THAT. I'D OF TAKEN NO FOR AN ANSWER. :snf:

WOMEN. I'M A GOD, BUT THEY DON' CARE...

YOU'RE JUST LIKE SIF. JUS' LIKE ALL OF THEM...

GOOD EVENING. I AM THE AMAZING CAIN, MASTER OF MYSTERY AND ILLUSION, AND THIS IS MY GLAMOROUS ASSISTANT GREGORY.

MY FIRST TRICK I CALL, "SAWING A FAT NINNY IN HALF!"

NOW, DON'T WRIGGLE THIS TIME, BOOBYBRAINS.

AMAZING CAIN and GREGORY WITH ABEL

IT MIGHT COME TO PASS THAT ONE COULD DISCUSS CERTAIN MATTERS WITH HIS VENERABLE WISDOM, THE SHAPER OF DREAMS, IN A PRIVATE PLACE.

That would honor this person greatly, Lord Susano-o-No-Mikoto...

Very well, Azazel. I see no reason why we should not talk privately.

I will send for you later...

...will send a flame to lead you to my apartments, Princess.

OKAY.

OH! LOOK AT THE FAT MAN. I LIKE HIM. IT FUNNY WHEN HE SHOUTS AND SHOUTS.

I THINK I MUST CALL HIM MISTER SHOUTY.

SIRE! MY MUNIFICENT MASTER, KILDERKIN OF ORDER--HERE INCARNATED FOR OUR DELIGHT AS A MOST SACRED CARDBOARD BOX--HAS MANIFESTED A MESSAGE, TO BE GIVEN ONLY TO YOUR STAR-LIKE EYES.

WE MUST TALK.

Very well. Bring your master to me later. I will send for you both.

TAA DAAH! NOW, MY LITTLE TROLLEY-OGGLER, CAN YOU WIGGLE YOUR RIGHT FOOT FOR THE NICE PEOPLE?

CUH-CAIN, YOU, ERM, YOU RUHREALLY *CAN* PUH-P-PUT ME BACK TOGETHER AGAIN. UHN, C-CAN'T YOU?

"I *TELL* YOU, THE DRUNKEN OAF PROPOSED TO MAKE *LOVE* TO ME!"

As host, I can but apologize, Lady Bast. You were obviously provoked, and I will speak to Lord Odin about it. Where is Thor now?

I LEFT HIM LAYING UNDER THE TABLE, CHANTING SOME *SONG* TO HIMSELF.

IT BEGAN: "MY *HAMMER* HAS A HUGE HARD HANDLE."

THE SOT WAS *ALSO* TRYING TO WIPE HIS *VOMIT* FROM THE CARPET WITH HIS *BEARD*.

Again, lady, I apologize.

IT IS NO MATTER, DREAM LORD. THAT WAS NOT WHY I WISHED TO TALK WITH YOU.

NO? Then, why?

"WE MUST TALK IN *PRIVATE*. YOU HAVE SOMETHING THAT *WE* WANT. *VERY* BADLY. AND *WE* HAVE SOMETHING *YOU* DESIRE."

"Very well. Later. I will send for you, Lady Bast."

AND *WHAT'S* IN THE EMPTY BOX? *BLESS MY SOUL!* IT *ISN'T EMPTY!*

CUH-CUH-CAIN. YUH-YOU BUHBUHBUH...

SHUT *UP*, YOU CRETIN. YOU *SAID* YOU *WANTED* TO BE IN SHOW BUSINESS, *DIDN'T* YOU?

CLAP CLAP CLAP

*LOOK!* IT MISTER SHOUTY. HE'S A POOEY MAN.

AND FOR MY *NEXT* TRICK...

GREGORY, THE *MINCING* MACHINE, PLEASE.

YOU ASKED WHAT THE *OTHER* PRIZE WAS, *DIDN'T* YOU? WHAT *ELSE* OUR LORD AZAZEL WAS GOING TO OFFER THE DREAM KING, IN EXCHANGE FOR HELL.

WELL, IT *MUST* BE OBVIOUS NOW, MY DARLING.

IT'S *YOU*.

Good guests, that concludes this evening's entertainment, and the banquet.

CLAP CLAP CLAP!

DID MISTER SHOUTY REALLY BE SAUSAGES?

We have a long day ahead of us tomorrow. I will hear your formal pleadings, and I will announce my decision.

The time has come to go to the quarters I have assigned to you. I hope you will all find them to your liking.

THANK YOU, EVERYONE, FROM *MYSELF*, MY *ASSISTANT*, AND THE *STOOGE*.

*I'M* THE AMAZING *CAIN*. IF YOU *ENJOYED* THE SHOW, *TELL* YOUR *FRIENDS*. IF YOU *DIDN'T*, I TRUST YOU'LL GET *THROAT CANCER* AND *DIE* WITHOUT EVER *AGAIN* UTTERING ANOTHER *WORD*.

*GOODNIGHT*.

I suggest you leave this room at this time. It will cease to exist shortly.

Goodnight. I shall see you all in the Great Hall, tomorrow morn.

PLEASE, *DON'T* GO. I STILL DON'T EVEN KNOW YOUR *NAME*.

I CAN'T HELP IT. I'M SORRY. IT'S THE DOORBELL, I THINK...

BUT YOU *ARE* THE MASTER OF DECEPTION, LOKI --

I'VE TOLD YOU ALREADY: WE CANNOT *HOPE* TO TRICK HIM. NOT *HERE*. THE *BEST* WE CAN DO IS *NEGOTIATE*.

AND WE HAVE SOMETHING HE *MUST* WANT. *HE'LL* NEGOTIATE.

IT IS TIME. HE WISHES TO SEE ME.

°°SHOW-OFF.°°

°°S'NOTHING °°SPESHUL, DOIN' °°FLAMES. ANY-°°ONE C'N DO °°FLAMES.

°°I C'N DO °°LIGHTNING. °°THASS BLOODY °°HARD.°°

Enter.

I THANK YOU FOR AGREEING TO SEE ME, DREAM WEAVER.

The pleasure is all mine, Rune-Lord. I regret our discussion must be brief. I have much to do this night.

SOME OTHERS TO SEE, I'D HAZARD.

Perhaps.

We have no time for nice words, Odin One-Eye. You wish me to grant you the Hell that once was Lucifer's.

I have not decided what to do with the place. Tell me, then, why should it be yours?

I AM A *BRAVE* GOD. YOU *KNOW* THAT TO BE TRUE. THERE IS ONLY *ONE* THING THAT FRIGHTENS ME.

Ragnarok.

INDEED. *RAGNAROK*. THESE DAYS TOO MUCH OF MY TIME IS SPENT HATCHING SCHEMES TO CIRCUMVENT THE DARKNESS AHEAD OF ME AND MINE.

I *PICK* AT IT, IRRATIONALLY, AS A MAN PICKS AT A *SORE*.

SOME YEARS AGO, IT OCCURRED TO ME THAT IT IS EASIER TO FIGHT SOMETHING ONE *KNOWS* SOMETHING ABOUT.

I CREATED A *WORLD*--A *NOTIONAL DIMENSION*--AND IN IT, I FASHIONED A TINY RAGNAROK.

I DO NOT KNOW *HOW* THEY GOT THERE, NOR *WHY* THEY FIGHT, THESE LITTLE MORTAL HEROES.

IN MY WORLD, THE LAST BATTLE IS FOUGHT, DAY IN, DAY OUT, FOR *EVER*. I HAVE LEARNED *MUCH* FROM IT.

ONE THING THAT *SURPRISED* ME, THOUGH, WAS WHEN MY LITTLE WORLD GAINED *FURTHER* WARRIORS --ONES I HAD NOT CREATED.

BUT *LOOK*, THEY WAR ALONGSIDE MY WEE AESIR IN THE BATTLE UNENDING.

AND--*THIS* WILL INTEREST YOU, DREAM-WEAVER--*ONE* OF THEM HAS SOME OF *YOUR* ESSENCE IN HIM. HE IS A VESSEL FOR A *FRACTION* OF YOUR *SOUL*.

WERE YOU TO GRANT ME THE HELL THAT WAS LUCIFER'S AS MY DOMAIN, I WOULD *GIVE* HIM TO YOU.

THERE.

I see.

YOU'RE A *COOL* ONE, DREAM-WEAVER. SOMETIMES I THINK YOU COULD ALMOST BE ONE OF THE AESIR.

I am myself, Odin One-Eye.

AND...?

And I keep my own counsel.

I will give my decision tomorrow, to all of you.

There is nothing more to be said.

The flame will guide you directly back to your rooms, Lord Odin.

Do not stray off the path. I cannot guarantee your safety elsewhere in the palace, and it would grieve me to see you harmed.

...and what exactly are you offering me, then?

YOU MISUNDERSTAND ME, DREAM-KING.

I'M NOT OFFERING YOU *ANYTHING*. WHAT *I'M* DOING...

WHAT *I'M* DOING IS *THREATEN-ING* YOU.

GIVE *US* THE HELL OF LUCIFER, MORPHEUS, OR THE ENTIRE HOST OF CHAOS WILL BE AT YOUR THROAT, UNTIL THE END OF TIME.

FROM THE *SHIVERING BRIGADE* TO THE *LAUGHING DANCERS*, ALL OF US.

Stop that, this instant.

Is this meant to impress me, Jemmy? Is it meant to scare me?

THAT'S *RIGHT*.

YOU CAN HAVE MY BALLOON, IF YOU LIKE.

YOU'RE MEANT TO BE *MISTER SCARED*.

SEE YOU *TOMORROW*, MISTER DREAMY.

NOW, OH SULTAN OF SLEEP, REACH YOUR LILY-WHITE HAND INTO MY MASTER, LORD KILDERKIN OF ORDER, AND TAKE THE MESSAGE THERE FOR YOU.

MY DEAR DREAM:
FOR MANY YEARS NOW, MYSELF AND SOME OF MY FELLOW LORDS OF ORDER HAVE BEEN COLLECTING THE DREAM-ESSENCES OF THE NEWLY DEAD, FOR PURPOSES OF OUR OWN.
WE ARE PREPARED TO RETURN THESE TO YOU, IN EXCHANGE FOR THE HELL OF LUCIFER, WHICH WILL BECOME A NEW REALM OF PERFECT ORDER, UNDER OUR DOMINION.
KILDERKIN

And this is supposed to impress me?

I am sorry, but I fail to understand why I should be interested in the dream-stuff of dead mortals. I am no collector, forever treasuring and tabulating that which has no further use.

BUT MY MASTER-- MY WONDROUS MASTER-- HE OFFERS YOU...

VERY WELL, MORPHEUS. IF BRIBERY WILL NOT WORK, REASON MIGHT.
TOMORROW I SHALL PLEAD THE RIGHTNESS OF OUR CLAIM. PERHAPS THAT WILL CONVINCE YOU.

Something that I would have collected for myself, had I a need for it.

But I see he has another message for me. After all, he can speak for himself.

Aye. Perhaps.

It should, perhaps, be mentioned that this one is here as a private individual. One has not come as part of his pantheon.

I understand. You may talk freely.

It is good.

The gods of *Nippon* are very powerful. We are no longer worshipped as once we were, but we have adapted.

Times have changed, and *we* have changed with them.

We are expanding-- assimilating other pantheons, later gods, new altars and icons. Marilyn Monroe is ours now, as are King Kong and Lady Liberty.

My mother is queen of our *own* underworld; it is a most *efficient* place. Lucifer's Hell should be ours too. It has *much* potential.

Name your price.

*Whatever* it is, we will pay it.

The matter will be given my most careful consideration, Honored Susano-O-No-Mikoto.

I HAVE SOMETHING YOU WANT.

And that thing is?

INFORMATION.

I SEE THE WORLD THROUGH THE EYES OF CATS.

THERE ARE THINGS THAT ARE HIDDEN FROM HUMANS AND GODS THAT *CANNOT* BE HIDDEN FROM *MY* PEOPLE, DREAM-KING.

MRR. I KNOW WHERE YOUR *BROTHER* CAN BE FOUND.

I see.

I KNOW WHERE HE *HIDES*. I, AND I ALONE.

WOULDN'T *THAT* BE WORTH THE PRICE OF THE HELL OF LUCIFER TO YOU AND YOUR FAMILY, DREAM?

Perhaps.

I *MUCH* PREFER YOU IN CAT FORM, DREAM, OLD FRIEND.

WHEN YOU WEAR A *HUMAN HEAD*, I FIND IT SO HARD TO KNOW WHAT YOU ARE *THINKING*.

I am thinking that this meeting is now at an end, Lady Bast. Please, return to your apartment. And do not wander from the path, as you return.

Matthew? What are you doing here?

KAAARK.

HI, BOSS.

LUCIEN SENT ME UP.

I WAS TALKING TO THESE TWO RAVENS: HUGINN AND MUNINN. TELLING 'EM THE STORY OF MY LIFE. NICE GUYS...

Matthew. Please.

OOOPS. SORRY, CHIEF. NOT A GOOD TIME FOR SMALL TALK, HUH?

YEAH, WELL, ANYWAY, WE GOT A PROBLEM. THERE'S A THUNDERSTORM BROKEN OUT IN THE SUITES DOWNSTAIRS. RAIN, LIGHTNING, ALL THAT STUFF.

That will be Thor...

One moment.

There. It is dealt with.

Now leave me, Matthew. The last of my surreptitious ambassadors is on its way to talk to me--and to cajole, threaten, or bribe.

OKAY, BOSS.

NICE BALLOON YOU GOT THERE.

If you like it, Matthew, it is yours. Here. Take it.

HUH? WHAT WILL I DO WITH A...

Azazel. Welcome.

I SEEK THE *RETURN* OF OUR *LANDS*, MORPHEUS. THE LANDS OF MY *PEOPLE*, THE LANDS FROM WHICH WE HAVE BEEN *UNJUSTLY EXPELLED*.

I DO *NOT* COME TO YOU AS A MERE *AMBASSADOR*, BUT AS THE *REPRESENTATIVE* OF THE *WHOLE* OF *DAEMONKIND*; POOR, DISPOSSESSED CREATURES, WHOSE HOMELAND HAS BEEN *RIPPED* FROM THEM.

I SEEK NATURAL *JUSTICE*, MORPHEUS. GIVE US BACK OUR *WORLD!*

Save the speech-making for other times, Azazel. It leaves me unmoved.

AH.

You want the Hell that was Lucifer's.

I cannot suppose that you came here relying on my good nature, or my sense of natural justice.

What are you offering me, Azazel?

NOT *ONE* THING, BUT *TWO*, DREAM-LORD.

FIRSTLY: YOU CAME TO HELL TWO YEARS AGO, TO RETRIEVE YOUR HELMET.

IT WAS IN THE POSSESSION OF ONE CHORONZON, A DUKE OF THE EIGHTH CIRCLE, AND A CAPTAIN OF BEELZEBUB'S HORDES.

INSOLENTLY, CHORONZON CHALLENGED YOU; AND YOU DEFEATED HIM, IN THE OLDEST GAME.

I BROUGHT HIM TO THE DREAMWORLD JUST FOR YOU, MORPHEUS. HE IS HELPLESS. HE CAN BE YOURS TO TAKE VENGEANCE ON. YOU CAN LEAVE HIM SCREAMING FOR AN ETERNITY...

...I see. And the second thing.

AH. THAT'S NOTHING--VERY MUCH.

JUST A HUMAN FEMALE, CONDEMNED TO HELL TEN THOUSAND YEARS PAST, BY A RESENTFUL LOVER.

BUT ISN'T SHE A SWEET AND TOOTHSOME MORSEL?

IF YOU GIVE ME THE KEY TO HELL, I'LL THROW HER INTO THE DEAL. AS A SWEETENER, YOU MIGHT SAY.

IF WE CANNOT COME TO AN AGREEMENT, THOUGH--UNLIKELY AS THAT PROSPECT MUST BE--I WILL TAKE GREAT PLEASURE IN CONSUMING HER SOUL.

I WILL GOBBLE HER UP AND GULP HER DOWN AND MAKE HER A PART OF ME FOREVER--WHAT TINY SPARK OF HER CONSCIOUSNESS STILL REMAINS, AFTER THAT, WILL BE MINE.

DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?

I do.

SO--I TRUST WE HAVE A *DEAL*, DREAM-LORD.

TOMORROW YOU WILL MAKE YOUR ANNOUNCEMENT, AND I WILL QUIT THIS PLACE, CARRYING WITH ME THE *KEY TO HELL*, AND LEAVING *YOU* WITH *CHORONZON* AND *NADA*.

Thank you, Azazel.

I will take the matter under consideration.

You may leave now.

WHAT DO YOU *MEAN*? "TAKE THE MATTER UNDER CONSIDERATION"?

YOU *WANT* THE GIRL, DON'T YOU? YOU WENT TO *HELL* FOR HER--SURELY YOU'LL *TRADE* HER FOR A *KEY* THAT COST YOU *NOTHING*, THAT YOU DON'T EVEN *WANT*...

Azazel, you have told me what you are offering me. I have understood you. You will hear my decision tomorrow.

NOW: go.

"Of course, it's not just a favor we'd be asking. There is much that Faerie can offer you..."

"One of them has some of your essence in him. He is a vessel for a fraction of your soul..."

"Give us the Hell of Lucifer, Morpheus, or the entire Host of Chaos will be at your throat, until the end of time..."

"Tomorrow I shall plead the rightness of our claim. Perhaps that will convince you..."

"Name your price. Whatever it is, we will pay it..."

CHINK

CHINK

CHINK.

"I know where your brother can be found..."

"If we cannot come to an agreement, though--unlikely as that prospect must be--I will take great pleasure in consuming her soul..."

If only it were that easy.

If I could just throw it away...

To Be Continued

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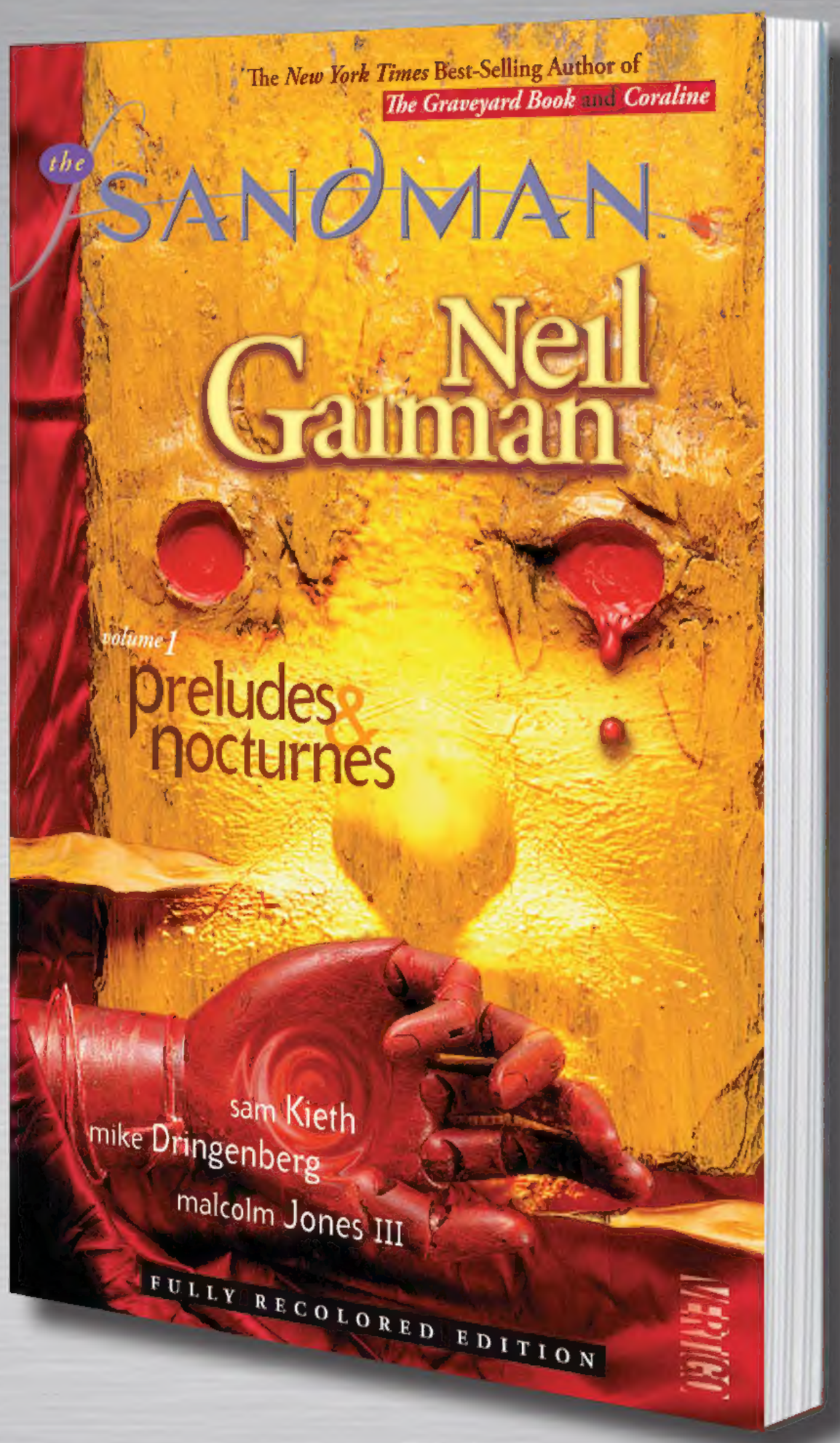


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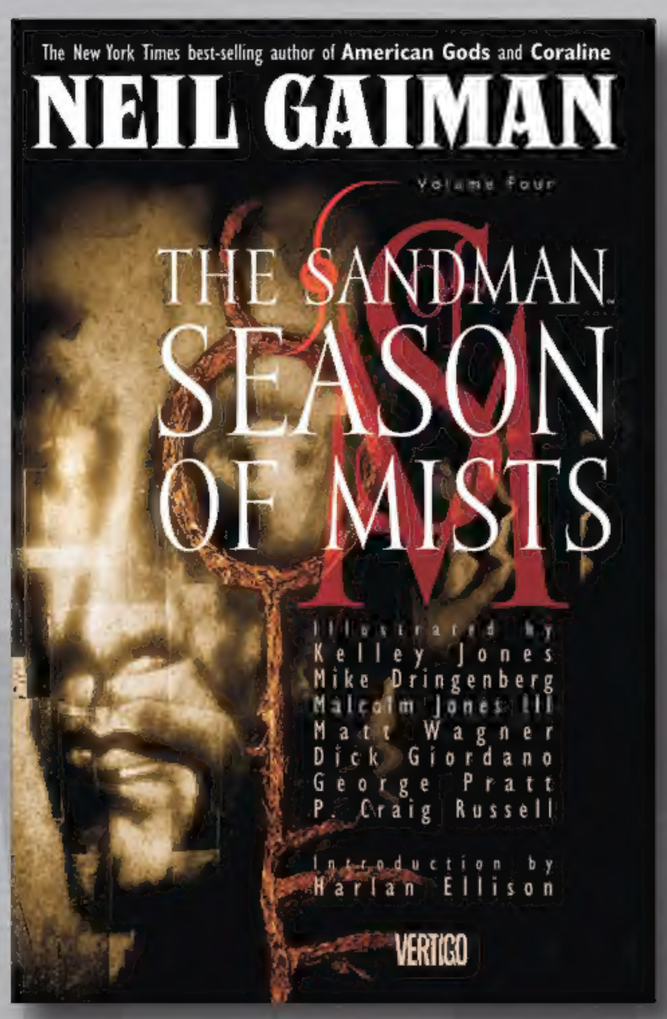


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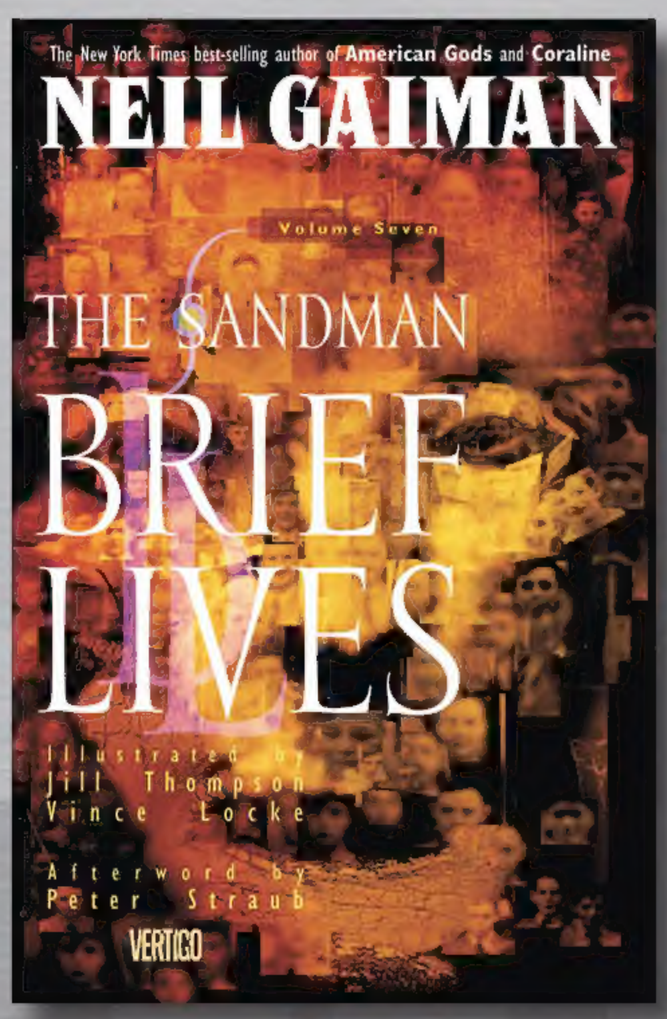


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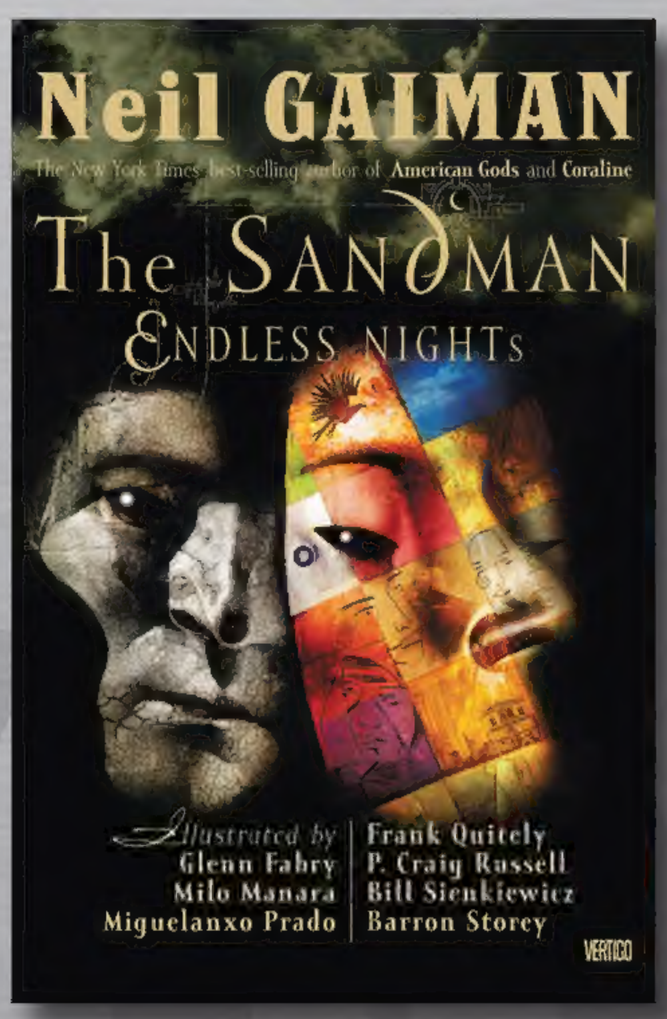


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